

# AZERBAIJAN AS AN IMPORTANT GEOPOLITICAL CENTER OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE POLITICS OF THE LEADING STATES OF THE WORLD AND REGION

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## **Abstract**

*The article examines the importance of the foreign policy course for Azerbaijan. The point is that Azerbaijan only demonstrates its experience of implementing a balanced political course in such a complex region as the South Caucasus in a systematic or new geopolitical reality. This should be regarded as a step forward in the region's diplomacy. This aspect of foreign policy is very important from the point of view of international credibility as a result of the confidence in the country and its results. Nowadays, the coordination of activities within the framework of global organizations with the activities of regional organizations plays a crucial role in ensuring sovereignty. Azerbaijan has become an exemplary state that has implemented a systematic and multi-vector foreign policy course in the region, as well as world. Azerbaijan cooperates with all states on an equal footing. Noteworthy is that, strong states have to take account of Azerbaijan's fair position. This is an important point in foreign policy. The point is that Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that has successfully pursued a balanced foreign policy. Baku skillfully balances the interests of the great powers in the region. Azerbaijan is thus gaining a geopolitical dividend that meets national interests. This issue should be considered as an integral part of the strategy of "flexible alliances." Over the past two years, the leadership of the country has achieved significant results in this aspect, the relations with the United States and Europe have risen to a new level, and the relations in energy and security have deepened. The agreements reached during the visit to Britain and France once again reaffirmed the special role of Azerbaijan in the fight against international terrorism and its energy security. The European Union has shown its interest in raising the bilateral relations to a new level, in which relations with the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership Continues its active participation in the format of this event.*

## INTRODUCTION.

Azerbaijan declared its independence on October 18, 1991. Azerbaijan conducts a balanced, interest-based policy that meets the national interests of the country and the needs of influential participants around it - President Aliyev skillfully plays a multi vector game. Azerbaijan can guarantee its national security through a balanced foreign policy. Azerbaijan is adapting to the changing environment. This allows Azerbaijan to develop a modus vivendi with regional actors, as well as outside the South Caucasus. Oil and gas wealth in the Caspian Sea contributed to the strengthening of Azerbaijan's independence. BTC and Baku-Supsa were the initiatives of Azerbaijan. Strengthening US-Azerbaijan security ties opened the way for cooperation with Germany, France and the United Kingdom. The development of pragmatic relations allowed Azerbaijan and its partners to find mutually acceptable solutions to the regional problems. Azerbaijan is the most economically developed country in the South Caucasus, despite the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the situation with refugees.

The South Caucasus is a region where Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are located. They have always been on the outskirts of different empires throughout the history: the Sassanid Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Caliphate, the Seljuk Empire, the Mongol Empire, the Turks, the Safavid Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Russia and finally the USSR. The region was constantly moving from one political center to another, from where it imported management and education models, as well as ethnic and religious identity. The existence of these powerful political and cultural centers throughout the region did not allow earlier opportunities for the local states to raise and strengthen as a geopolitical center. In other words, mostly the region was in foreign regimes. The region is used to "import" or be managed. With such a historical past, it is not surprising to see different inclinations in the region towards different political centers [2].

There is a point where the three great powers - Russia, Turkey and Persia - meet: the Caucasus. At this moment, they converge in the country called Azerbaijan. This fact makes Azerbaijan the country area of conflict of interests for these three great powers, which over the centuries competed with each other along different borders. Until 1991, Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union, like the rest of the South Caucasus. But as the Russian border moved north, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been re-discovered by history. Among these countries, Azerbaijan won a geopolitical award bordering the great regional powers. Azerbaijan also became a major energy producer [3]. Azerbaijan has an important role for several reasons. First, its energy, geopolitics and security. Secondly, its location in the Caucasus - in a very sensitive part of the world - bordering on Russia, Iran and Turkey. Therefore, when these forces compete or cooperate, the consequences of their activities are essential for the rest of the world. Therefore, Azerbaijan is influential in terms of its location and changing geopolitics in the region. For all these reasons, Azerbaijan occupies substantial place in US foreign policy [4]. The role of the United States in the Caspian region has gone through several stages since 1991. Initially, Washington did not seek to assert its influence in the region. This policy mainly resulted from the lack of knowledge and

initiative towards the Caspian region, as well as the lack of realization of American interests here. However, by 1994-1995, American policy was in transition. The oil resources of Azerbaijan and the war in Chechnya demonstrated the military potential of Russia to US officials - there were two factors that prompted Washington to start the policy from the second half of 1996. The United States announced that they consider the Caucasus and the Caspian region to be vital for US interests [5, p.17]. American money began to flow into Baku thanks to the investments of oil companies of America, which were attracted by the energy resources of Azerbaijan. Soon, energy diplomacy finally defined US policy towards the South Caucasus, which, because of its geographical location, was viewed as an open door for achieving the energy-rich regions of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. In this context, Azerbaijan has become a potential engine of regional integration, the importance of which has been stressed several times by the American strategist and statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski. According to him, Azerbaijan "deserves the highest US support," because it is one of the most important "geopolitical rods of Eurasia." He also wrote that, despite the limited size and small population, Azerbaijan with huge energy resources is also geopolitically critical. This is a cork in a bottle containing the richness of the basin of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. The independence of the Central Asian states may become practically meaningless if Azerbaijan fully submits to the control of Moscow. Significant oil resources of the country can also be subjected to the control of Russia, as soon as Azerbaijan's independence is annulled. Independent Azerbaijan, connected with the western markets by pipelines that do not pass through the territory controlled by Russia, also becomes the main means of access from the advanced and energy-intensive economies to the energy-rich republics of Central Asia [7, p. 46-47].

On the one hand, Washington sought to "westernize" the oil industry of Azerbaijan by inviting Western oil companies to help the development of its energy resources and build a multi-tubular system in Western Europe. This was considered the best way to "avoid exclusive dependence on Russia's energy transportation system" and "limit Iran's participation in the development and transportation of these resources" [6, p. 24].

After George W. Bush's election and the events of September 11, 2001, and the result of the "war on terror", fundamental changes in US foreign policy took place. The "paradigm of the world" and soft energy tools developed under the Clinton administration were replaced by a "military paradigm" and instruments of strong power that became decisive in promoting American interests and the global projection of US power. The new global strategy of the United States was to try to establish a military presence in the South Caucasus. As the neighboring countries of the Caucasus, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, pose a direct threat to the security of the United States, as well as the security of the European allies, the region has become a top priority for US security interests. After military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001 and 2003, Washington began to pay more attention to the South Caucasus and to Azerbaijan in particular. As a result of Azerbaijan's cooperation with the US in the fight against terrorism, President George W. Bush declined article 907 of the Law on Support for Freedom in January 2002. Strangely enough, it was only after the tragedy of September 11 that the US government and the US

Congress realized that Article 907 was harmful to American interests for all these years [8, p. 193]. Azerbaijan participated in US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, given its geographical location, Azerbaijan provided logistical support for military operations for ISAF.

Speaking about relations with the United States, it is also important to touch upon economic relations. The process of economic transformation of Azerbaijan was not affected only by the war with Armenia, as well as by the international relations formed under the influence of this war. The Azerbaijani government, which turned its face to the West after independence to regulate its economy, made efforts to establish economic relations with the United States. Prior to the signing of the "Contract of the Century" in 1994, three agreements were signed with the aim of establishing economic relations between the two countries. The first one was connected with "Foreign Private Investment Cooperation", signed in September 1992 in order to support investments. The second agreement, aimed at improving commercial relations, was signed on April 12, 1993. The third agreement was signed on September 28, 1993 between the Azerbaijani and US governments on the issue of investment support. Within the framework of these agreements, a legal framework was established for the investment of American firms in Azerbaijan and was aimed at encouraging such firms. Also influential factor in the development of economic relations between the two countries was the adoption of the law of April 5, 1994 "Liberalization of foreign trade in Azerbaijan." In the framework of efforts to improve mutual economic ties, President Heydar Aliyev welcomed US Deputy Energy Minister Charles on June 5, 1996. During the meeting, it was agreed that it was necessary to improve mutual economic relations, and it was stressed that the role of the United States in Azerbaijan would be consolidated. On the one hand, improving mutual economic relations will contribute to the economy of Azerbaijan, and on the other hand, it will increase the number and influence of the friends of Azerbaijan, and thereby, will help to eliminate the negative perception of Azerbaijan in the United States. The US government opened a chamber of commerce in Baku on December 18 in order to improve economic relations with Azerbaijan. At the ceremony, held with the participation of J. Kalitsky, who was responsible for economic relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Kalitsky said that the Clinton administration attaches great importance to commercial cooperation with Azerbaijan. Economic relations between the United States and Azerbaijan have developed with an emphasis on oil. In his speech after the visit to Baku I. Kalitsky mentioned that the relations between Azerbaijan and the United States should include not only incentives for investments in energy, but also in other areas of the economy of Azerbaijan. Kalitsky also touched upon the economic reforms in Azerbaijan, saying that these reforms are suitable for US interests [10, p. 66]. Azerbaijan is America's largest trading partner in the South Caucasus and successfully conducts large mutually beneficial trade deals. For example, Azerbaijan signed a major contract with Boeing worth \$ 1 billion - for the purchase of eight civilian aircraft, including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. In general,

trade with Azerbaijan helps support more than 11,000 jobs throughout the United States. The US and Azerbaijan have an Agreement on Trade Relations and a Bilateral Investment Treaty. Governments periodically gather the Economic Partnership Commission of the United States and Azerbaijan to discuss bilateral cooperation to promote trade and investment. The United States has long supported Azerbaijan's efforts to develop and export its energy resources to Western markets, and crude oil is the largest import from Azerbaijan. US companies participate in projects to develop oil fields in Azerbaijan, export aircraft and heavy equipment to the country and study new investment opportunities in telecommunications and other areas.

The Law on the Protection of Foreign Investments permits foreign direct investment in any activity into which a national investor can invest, unless otherwise prohibited by law, including those relating to national security and defense. Azerbaijan was appointed as a beneficiary country within the framework of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program, according to which a number of products that Azerbaijan can aspire to export have the right to duty-free entry to the United States. The GSP program provides an incentive for investors to produce in Azerbaijan and export the selected products duty-free to the US market [11].

Thus, we see that Azerbaijan is influential for the United States as a regional geopolitical player. The USA for Azerbaijan is a global partner in various fields with whom the policy of rapprochement is conducted, but considering

Furthermore, today, Turkey is one of Azerbaijan's strategic partners. Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan are flourishing, since Turkey recognized a new independent Azerbaijan in 1991. Turkey and Azerbaijan are currently linked by projects covering the political, military, economic, cultural and social spheres, and the links between the two peoples are expressed in the saying: "One nation, two states". Energy cooperation in the Azerbaijani-Turkish relations is of great importance. Two pipelines, which supply oil and gas, link Azerbaijan with Turkey through Georgia. Thus, Turkey plays an important role in the transit of hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea to European markets. The ties in energy cooperation are so close that experts note that they are moving away from the classic "low policy" relationship to "high politics". The supremacy of energy cooperation in relations with Turkey can be caused only by military relations. Turkey first closed the border with Armenia after the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, supporting Azerbaijan in creating the semi-blockade of Armenia. Since then, he helped Azerbaijan to strengthen its military capabilities. Thousands of officers and non-commissioned officers of Azerbaijan underwent military training in Turkey. As a member of NATO, Turkey helps Azerbaijan in developing its armed forces to the highest standards supported by the Alliance, thus, creating a favorable atmosphere for Azerbaijan-NATO relations. At the same time, due to their relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey are interested in the development of regional projects and ensuring energy security in the region. It should be noted that Turkey's interest in the establishment of a regional energy center is largely supported by Azerbaijan. Energy projects and close cooperation in the development of energy policies favorable to the economy are trademarks of the Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. Azerbaijan

also gives Turkey a reference to Central Asia, to which ethnic Turks are connected both culturally and historically. Since Azerbaijan remains part of the post-Soviet space, it can promote such cooperation. In addition, Azerbaijan seeks to support Turkey in its struggle against the PKK, which is one of the highest priorities on the national security agenda of Turkey [9, p. 4].

The first years of AKP rule in Turkey created the image of a state aimed at realizing its intellectual, diplomatic and resource potential. Turkey and Azerbaijan have achieved great success in energy cooperation. In 2007 the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline was opened. The European Union in seeking access to markets in the Middle East and Central Asia is forced to act through an intermediary, supporting its leadership in the region. Turkey is striving to become the "fourth gas artery" of the European Union, this is indicated by its participation in the projects providing for gas transit through Turkey - TANAP, TAP, AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgian-Romanian project on transportation of liquefied gas). "Energy diplomacy" of Turkey has achieved the conclusion of contracts and the implementation of large enterprises. Ankara's ability to re-export Azerbaijani gas to Europe strengthens Turkey's position in its relationship with the EU. In order to increase their revenues and prevent the monopoly of Gazprom in the gas market, the Caspian countries want to take part in various pipeline projects. Among these countries, Azerbaijan, recently concluded with Turkey a new agreement on the supply of Azerbaijani natural gas for its use, and to ensure transit to Europe. The project of the main gas pipeline "Nabucco", which was planned from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to supply gas to Europe, remained unrealized. Most of the gas pipeline was to pass through the territory of the Republic of Turkey. For the transportation of Caspian oil bypassing Russia and Iran, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, built by previous rulers, was built and opened in 2006. This corridor project, bypassing Armenia, can both sever the South Caucasus and increase the chances for stabilization of relations, and this depends on the policies of the states [12]. Azerbaijan has always played for Turkey in the Caucasus in Central Asia and the Caspian region the key role of the mediator in providing communication with other, mainly Turkic-speaking, countries. Turkey for Azerbaijan is an "ally and reliance on the international arena". August 16, 2010, two states signed the Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance [13, p. 131].

Azerbaijan-Iran relations are one of the most complex bilateral relations in the region, which have undergone radical transformations over the past 20 years. These relationships are determined by several factors. The first of these is the presence in Iran of a 22-30 million Azeri minority, (the largest of the minorities). Since Azerbaijan gained independence, Tehran has been worried all the time that Baku can play an ethnic card for pressure on Iran. Secondly, Tehran irritates the secular nature of the Azerbaijani regime, which is still a model for development not only for Iranian Azerbaijanis, but also for other peoples. Annually in March, about 40 thousand Iranian citizens cross the border with Azerbaijan to celebrate Novruz in a secular state. At the same time, both states have been pursuing a policy of dialogue lately. This is confirmed by the visit of Azerbaijani President

Ilham Aliyev to Iran in March 2017. In the past few years, Tehran and Baku are actively building up close cooperation. The leaders of the two states today boldly declare that the relations between the countries have reached a new level and reached considerable heights. On March 5, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev arrived in Iran on a visit to his colleague Hasan Roukhani. The politicians held an important conversation, which confirmed the status of the allied relations. The Azerbaijani president, in turn, added that cooperation between states is developing much faster than he expected, and has already covered all areas of activity. The heads of state did not forget about the historical roots. Aliyev said that Azerbaijanis and citizens of Iran have been brothers for many centuries and should always be ready to help each other. He thanked Iran for its position on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "I want to express my gratitude to Iran for its position on the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the basis of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan. This position is based on international principles, laws and justice," he said. Aliyev noted that the territorial integrity of each country is inviolable. "The political ties between Azerbaijan and Iran are at a high level, we support each other in all international organizations," he said. In his turn, President Roukhani stressed that Iran respects the territorial integrity of all countries. "I hope that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will find its solution. Conflicts must be resolved through discussions and in a political way," he said. At the current stage, Iran makes its feasible contribution to the non-resumption of hostilities in the zone of the Karabakh conflict, to maintaining a balance of forces and interests between the opposing sides. Iran is not interested.

For 25 years, both the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation have demonstrated pragmatic and constructive efforts towards rapprochement. In an interview with the Russia-24 television channel, Ilham Aliyev touched upon the open, frank and independent policy of our state, especially with regard to Russia and the goals and objectives of this policy: "We intend to actively cooperate with as many countries as possible. For example, I would like to note that, as one of the most important moments of the past, joining the Non-Aligned Movement. I think it is a very important, necessary, timely and remarkable step. In doing so, we emphasize that we are first of all open to the world because many countries are united in that organization. On the other hand, we emphasize Azerbaijan's position in the future processes in the world".

According to the experts' opinion, the dialectics and content of the "complicated" way of communication between Azerbaijan and Russia over the past 25 years of state independence can be divided into the following stages:

1. The period of contention - restoration of state independence - from April 1991 to October 1993.
2. The beginning of a constructive dialogue - from October 1993 to January 2001.
3. Mutually beneficial cooperation and the stage of identification of common interests - from January 2001 to July 2008.
4. Strategic Partnership Stage - from July 2008 to present.

As it was noted, 1991-1993 was the most complicated stage of the relations between the two countries. Some of the factors constituting these contradictions were of a common character. For instance, in the other republics, Russia and Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union faced serious socio-economic and political problems. On the other hand, these republics for about 70 years, the main mobilizing and unifying function communism, the ideology of bankruptcy as a result of ideological vacuum outside alternative and in many cases the destructive nature of bad ideas, religious and political movements influence to it, are not available for the public ideologically to split Was removed. In addition to political and economic problems, both young people faced internal threats - foreign-controlled ethnic separatism. Interstate at that time, there were new stereotypes and tendencies that hindered relations. Thus, 1992-1993 was included in the history of Azerbaijan as a poverty, arbitrariness and chaos. The AXC-Musavat authorities were unable to take the necessary measures to eliminate these threats. They were not interested in the development of relations with the neighboring states, especially the Russian Federation. In this complicated period, the official Baku seeks to get rid of all the political, social, economic and financial problems faced by the country, especially from the military conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh, and the liberation of artificial separatisms in the north and south regions of the country only in the West, Who saw Russia as a legal heir. Any activity of Russia in the region was regarded as a geopolitical activity aimed at the restoration of the Soviet Union. Recall that, as in other republics, Azerbaijan still faced such an attempt in 27 June, 1991, the local Soviet Union made a decision to join Azerbaijan in the new union - the Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States. The signing of a new alliance was not just a result of the August Revolt in Moscow. Official Moscow, which seeks Azerbaijan in the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of Russia, has regarded the policy pursued by the AXC-Musavat administration as a source of threat and made different accusations. Nevertheless, this contradictory stage had some positive impact on the future development of normal and lasting positive relationships. The internal and external problems, the sensitive moments, which could harm relations, were clarified at that time. At the same time, despite the political contradictions, Azerbaijan tried to hold positions outside Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, but mutual accusations did not prevent the proximity of nations and the tendencies of communication. However, it should also be acknowledged that one of the reasons for mutual mistrust in relations between Azerbaijan and Russia in 1991-1995 was the lack of confidence of our some northern neighbor's political circles to be ready for interstate cooperation and the introduction of artificial stereotypes to the political circle. As noted above, the stages of establishing good neighborly relations between two countries on constructive basis, mutually beneficial cooperation and identification of common interests are directly related to the political and diplomatic activities of national leader Heydar Aliyev and his rich statehood experience. Just after Heydar Aliyev returned to the political power, in the early 1990s, both sides managed to gradually eliminate the cold and uncertainty resulting from Bolshevik



Maximalism and normalize relations. Heydar Aliyev said: "The Popular Front is pursuing an anarchy policy, and it does all the way to avoid rapprochement between Russia and Azerbaijan. Apparently, Moscow was also satisfied. You know my attitude to Russia. Azerbaijan is dependent on Russia, economically, culturally and geopolitically. We are not just neighbors, we have a common history. I repeat: the current attitude to Russia does not satisfy me, and I am convinced that this will definitely change ". Later on, Vladimir Putin said about the historical role of Heydar Aliyev in bringing Russian-Azerbaijani relations to a higher level: "For many years Heydar Aliyev's effective activity has been directly linked to the common history of our peoples. He laid the foundation for strategic partnership between Russia and Azerbaijan, made a great contribution to strengthening our friendship and mutual understanding. " In this regard, Vyacheslav Trubnikov, the First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, is also interested in his views: "For Heydar Aliyev, Russia has been a historic and comprehensive supporter of the comprehensive Azerbaijani-Russian relations in the 21st century, the strengthening of the strategic partnership between the two countries" [15, p. 177].

Thus, if a small excursion to the history of Azerbaijani-Russian relations is observed, relations between the two countries have not been so easy in the first years after the independence. However, after the national leader Heydar Aliyev came to power, the situation began to change for the better. Starting from the summer of 1993, Heydar Aliyev played an important role in establishing friendly relations with Russia and laid the foundations for a strategic partnership between the two countries. As the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev commented on the importance of establishing relations between the two countries at the first meeting of the parliament on June 15, 1993: "Russia is a great state, our northern neighbor. Undoubtedly, relations between Russia and Azerbaijan on the basis of independent principles should be better, wider and more effective ". Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation were established on the basis of the relevant protocol signed on 4 April 1992 in Baku. In 1992, embassies of Azerbaijan in Russia and Russia in Azerbaijan started their activity. The main document forming the contractual basis of bilateral relations is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security signed between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan on July 3, 1997. After the signing of the agreement, the cooperation between the two countries was laid. The first official visit of Heydar Aliyev's visit to Russia on 2-4 July 1997 at the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin became the most important event in establishing bilateral relations.

In 2000, when Vladimir Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation, the leadership of the country began to propagate more pragmatic positions and prisms in relations with Azerbaijan. In contrast to the previous period, it was not just an integration framework within the CIS, but also the national interests of both countries (security, economic development). In the subsequent period, a substantial political base was formed to establish close friendly relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. Almost 150 intergovernmental documents have been signed between the two countries. These

documents cover areas such as political, military-technical, security, economic (trade, investment, finance, fuel-energy cooperation, transportation of oil of Azerbaijan through Russia), scientific, cultural, and protection of the rights of homeland. Heydar Aliyev's and Ilham Aliyev's official and business trips to Russia, Vladimir Putin's and Dmitry Medvedev's visits to Azerbaijan gave impetus to the development of bilateral relations. On January 9-10, 2001, the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin held a state visit to Russia on 3-4 July 2008, Heydar Aliyev's visit to Russia on January 24-27, 2002, Official visits of President Aliyev to Russia on 5-7 February 2004, 19-20 April 2009 created favorable conditions for the development of relations between the two countries. In recent years, Azerbaijan and Russia have an intensive political dialogue at all levels. The system-oriented international legal documents have high dynamics. The 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security was developed by the 2001 Baku Declaration and the 2004 Moscow Declaration. The Joint Declaration on Friendship and Partnership, signed during Dmitry Medvedev's official visit to Azerbaijan, has deepened friendly and neighborly relations. It is enough to pay attention to mutual visits during the last 3 years to prove the active development of the relations at high level. Visiting Azerbaijan on August 13, 2013, Vladimir Putin discussed with his Azerbaijani counterpart the political situation and the Nagorno-Karabakh situation. According to the results of the visit, agreements on cooperation in the field of oil and gas production and the construction of a bridge over the two states were signed. On February 6-8, 2014, Ilham Aliyev has attended the opening ceremony of the XXII Sochi Winter Olympics. On August 8-10, 2014, Ilham Aliyev paid a working visit to Russia. During the visit, two presidents discussed a number of bilateral and regional issues. On September 29-30, 2014, Aliyev attended the IV Summit of the Caspian littoral states in Astrakhan and on the events dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow on May 8-9, 2015. On June 12-13, 2015, Vladimir Putin paid a working visit to Baku. Bilateral relations and international issues were discussed during the visit. Vladimir Putin also attended the opening ceremony of the first European Games. On June 20, 2016 Aliyev visited St. Petersburg. During the meeting with the Russian President, the current situation in bilateral relations, humanitarian cooperation and solution of the Karabakh problem were discussed. On August 8, 2016, Vladimir Putin paid a working visit to Azerbaijan. A trilateral meeting of the presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran was held during the visit. During the working visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Azerbaijan on August 8, 2016, President Ilham Aliyev described the Azerbaijani-Russian relations as follows: "Frequently occurring meetings, of course, give a new impetus to the development of our relations. These relations, who have already reached the level of strategic partnership, already cover almost all aspects of our lives. We actively interact in international spaces, strengthen political dialogue, strengthen economic ties, have good results in transport and energy, and humanitarian cooperation develops. "Over the past few years, joint efforts have found solutions to the optimal, mutually acceptable and beneficial sides of a number of important issues for both sides. The State Border

Agreement was signed, the issue of protection and rational use of the Samur River was resolved and the situation with Russian citizens living in two villages of Khachmaz region was resolved. The process of approaching the positions of Moscow, Baku and Astana on the status of the Caspian Sea has actually been completed."

The humanitarian cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation is mainly regulated by humanitarian cooperation programs. There are bilateral agreements and treaties regulating almost all aspects of humanitarian relations between the two countries, as well as renewed cooperation programs between the ministries of culture of the two countries and protocols on cooperation between the ministries of education. The Azerbaijani side, along with the central federal government, is also closely cooperating with Russian subjects in the humanitarian sphere. The indication of the high level of humanitarian cooperation between the two countries over the past few years has undoubtedly been supported by the "Azerbaijan-Russia Humanitarian Forum" held in Baku in 2010 and under the auspices of the President of the two countries in Baku every year "Baku International Humanitarian Forums". The participation of delegations from both countries at these events, the relevance and relevance of the discussed issues, its transition from the bilateral framework to the international level and the transformation into an internationally recognized platform, Azerbaijan's contribution to the development of Russian humanitarian ties not only bilateral but also humanitarian cooperation at the international level is a clear indication. The role of Heydar Aliyev Foundation in the development of humanitarian and cultural cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia should be especially emphasized. The Fund holds a number of charitable actions in Russia, acts as organizer of cultural events. It is no coincidence that on June 9, 2005, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Vice President Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva for his contribution to the social, cultural and philanthropic activities, educational and cultural institutions, for his significant contribution to the strengthening of friendship between the Russian and Azerbaijani peoples, "Awarded to the International Charitable Foundation" Yaquut Khach". The Vice-President of the Foundation, Mrs. Leyla Aliyeva, was awarded with the Order of the 3rd Degree "Knyaginya Olga" for the promotion of the Prince of Vladimire in Astrakhan and the construction of a new park in the surrounding area. Besides, with the initiative and support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Leyla Aliyeva was awarded the "For Services in the Astrakhan Region" for the construction of the Russian-Azerbaijani Friendship Bridge, the creation of the Arzu Children's Playground in the Heydar Aliyev Park and the implementation of other social projects in the city of Astrakhan. On February 20-24, 2008, Ilham Aliyev was named honorary professor of the Moscow State University named after M. Lomonosov during his working visit to Moscow to attend an informal summit of the CIS Heads of State. One of the most important events in the field of education between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation was the launch of the Baku branch of the Moscow State University named after M. V. Lomonosov, one of the world's leading educational institutions in 2008, in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated January 15, 2008 It was. On September 26, 2012 the new educational complex of the branch was put into operation. In September 2015, Baku

branch of the First Moscow State Medical University named after I. Sechenov opened in Baku. More than 150,000 Russians live in Azerbaijan. It is the largest Russian diaspora in the South Caucasus that has maintained its ethnic identity, culture, language and religion. All the conditions for full integration of Russians into the country's socio-economic, political and cultural life have been created, as well as other nations in Azerbaijan. Russian Information and Culture Center operates, Russian Drama Theater named after Samad Vurgun is very popular. The Russian community is a real link between the two peoples. One of the leaders of the Russian community in Azerbaijan, Viktor Zabelin is a member of the Azerbaijani Parliament. The Russian Orthodox Church in Baku plays an important role in maintaining the cultural and spiritual heritage, customs and traditions of the Russian community. One of the important factors of socio-political and humanitarian relations between Azerbaijan and Russia is the preservation and development of the Russian language in the republic. In Azerbaijan, 327 secondary schools and 27 universities are taught in Azerbaijani and Russian and 16 in Russian only. The number of pupils and students studying in Russian is over 100,000. One of the major centers for Russian language study in Baku - Baku Slavic University operates in Baku.

Sum up all the above, it can be concluded that Russia's rejection of the new empire instinct can make it a desirable guest in Azerbaijan and the former Soviet Union. Russia can play a crucial role in settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia, by solving the conflict, can also build trust in its neighbors and play a significant role in the settlement of other international conflicts. By solving the conflict at the same time, Russia can form a common Caucasian market with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Probably, the long history of the Russian-Azerbaijani friendship, despite the difficulties of the time, will continue successfully. The future friendly relations between our countries will give impetus to all areas and bring our nations closer. Finally, let's summarize Ilham Aliyev's speech on the general review of interstate relations during Vladimir Putin's visit to Baku in August 2013. "The agenda of our relations is very broad. Cooperation is multidimensional and multilateral, covering almost all areas. Our positions on economic relations, humanitarian, transport, regional security and all issues are similar. In other words, our relations are developing very successfully" [16].

Thus, Azerbaijan is now considered as a key geopolitical location as the most promising partner in ensuring peace and security in the region. Our country is a major participant in all regional issues and, as Aliyev noted, "no strategic project in the region can be realized without the consent of Azerbaijan." As a result of the successful foreign policy implemented by President Ilham Aliyev, there are currently 57 embassies of foreign countries, permanent representations of five international organizations, 9 Consulate General, 7 representative offices and 7 honorary consulates. There are embassies of 58 countries, four general consulates, 10 honorary consulates and representation of 20 international organizations. Over the past two years, our country has opened new embassies in the Swiss Confederation, the Australian Union and the Socialist Republic of

Vietnam, the Consulate General of the United Arab Emirates in Dubai, and representative offices in Colombia and Uruguay. In addition, the Honorary Consulates and Missions of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Sudan, the Republic of Colombia, the Kingdom of Sweden, Kingdom of Spain and Malaysia, as well as a number of other states have begun to function.

Azerbaijan cooperates with all states on an equal footing. Noteworthy is that, strong states have to take account of Azerbaijan's fair position. This is an important point in foreign policy. The point is that Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that has successfully pursued a balanced foreign policy. Baku skillfully balances the interests of the great powers in the region. Azerbaijan is thus gaining a geopolitical dividend that meets national interests. This issue should be considered as an integral part of the strategy of "flexible alliances." Over the past two years, the leadership of the country has achieved significant results in this aspect, the relations with the United States and Europe have risen to a new level, and the relations in energy and security have deepened. The agreements reached during the visit to Britain and France once again reaffirmed the special role of Azerbaijan in the fight against international terrorism and its energy security. The European Union has shown its interest in raising the bilateral relations to a new level, in which relations with the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership Continues its active participation in the format of this event Baku was recognized as a worthy representative of Islamic culture, and diplomatic activities in the foreign policy of the CIS, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Cooperation Council of the Turkic-speaking States have risen to a new level. Azerbaijan has been fully able to adapt its activities within the framework of cooperation with the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. At present, Azerbaijan has 74 diplomatic missions and consulates in foreign countries, including 55 embassies, 5 international organizations, 9 Consulate General and 5 Honorary Consulates. There are embassies of 53 states, 3 general consulates, 12 honorary consulates and representations of 20 international organizations in Azerbaijan. There is no other country in the post-Soviet era now having such a systematic diplomatic activity. These were achieved through effective diplomatic activities.

Here, one should emphasize the importance of the foreign policy course for Azerbaijan. The point is that Azerbaijan only demonstrates its experience of implementing a balanced political course in such a complex region as the South Caucasus in a systematic or new geopolitical reality. This should be regarded as a step forward in the region's diplomacy. This aspect of foreign policy is very important from the point of view of international credibility as a result of the confidence in the country and its results. Nowadays, the coordination of activities within the framework of global organizations with the activities of regional organizations plays a crucial role in ensuring sovereignty. Azerbaijan has become an exemplary state that has implemented a systematic and multi-vector foreign policy course in the region.

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